1988 • 1990

ONLY • THE • BEGINNING . . .

OPEN LEARNING AGENCY

A partner in Open Learning in British Columbia

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1988 • 1990

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It has been an exciting and rewarding experience to have served on the board of directors and been "present at the creation" of the Open Learning Agency. It is no small task to merge two organizations into one and to assume a new mandate. This report chronicles the history of the past two-and-a-half years in terms of the varied collaborative projects and initiatives the Agency has undertaken in that time. These accomplishments would not have been possible were it not for the Agency's skilled and dedicated management and staff, and the support of the Ministry.

My fellow board members join me in expressing our appreciation of the ongoing support of the Agency's mission and mandate on the part of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology as well as that of our colleagues on the boards of our sister institutions throughout the province.

Donna Barnett

Barbara Fraser

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Dianne Kerr

Donna Mackey

Anne Moran

Jacqueline Riches

Margaret Vickers

J. Fred Weber,
Chairman, Board of Directors,
Open Learning Agency

Introduction

Glen M. Farrell, President, Open Learning Agency

When the provincial government created the Open Learning Agency by combining the Open Learning Institute and the Knowledge Network into a single organization, British Columbia took a giant step forward in the development of a province-wide open learning system.

Open learning is important for our province because it gives us an effective and economical means of meeting the challenge we face. That challenge is, quite simply, that we must increase our capacity to provide education and training, particularly in our post-secondary institutions, and to make learning more easily available. This means overcoming a number of barriers to access, chief among them being time, location, and cost.

Although open learning was introduced in B.C. precisely to overcome these barriers, lack of accessibility has, in recent years, become an increasingly pressing issue. In September, 1988, the B.C. Provincial Access Committee submitted its report to the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, noting five principal concerns:

- Institutional capacity and program quality;
- Literacy and adult basic education;
- University degree programs outside the Lower Mainland and south Vancouver Island areas;
- Under-represented groups (including Native people and the disabled);
- Admissions, credit transfer, and credit evaluation.

The report also recommended that "the advanced education and job training system give priority to the use of open learning systems to increase accessibility to educational opportunities."

Indeed, the entire report endorsed the mandate of the Open Learning Agency and underscored the importance of collaborative efforts among the universities, colleges, and institutes that offer advanced education and job training programs.

In an effort to increase the number of graduates from accredited programs, the Ministry announced a new "Access for All" program which will provide additional funds over the next five years. This will help, but a recently completed analysis of the province's economic growth projections for the next three to five years shows, among other things, that B.C. will be facing a demand for equivalent to 15,000 to 20,000 university graduates per year when we are presently able to provide at the most 10,000 to 12,500. In addition, every year about 150,000 people will require retraining as a result of new technologies and changes in the marketplace.

Clearly, those of us in the educational system have our work cut out for us. We must initiate and implement more collaborative arrangements among public institutions, private sector partners, and government. But we are, to some extent, handicapped by the fact that the public at large and many educators, business people, public officials, and professionals are unfamiliar with or have, at best, a limited understanding of the concept of open learning.

This report chronicles the first two-and-a-half years of the operation of the Open Learning Agency and describes initiatives taken by our operating components — the Open College, the Knowledge Network, and the Open University — in pursuit of our mandate to make access to lifelong learning a reality for British Columbians. It is intended not only to describe our current activities but also to provide a vision of what can be.

The Open Learning Agency (OLA) was established in April, 1988, but distance education as a means of enhancing access has been a part of the educational landscape in British Columbia for longer than that. The Distance Education Branch of the Ministry of Education has been in operation since the 1920s to serve primary and secondary school students who, because of personal circumstance or geographical distance, are unable to attend conventional schools. Our universities and many of our colleges have been involved in outreach programs using a variety of instructional methods virtually since their inception.

In 1978, in response to a recommendation from a special commission on new technologies and education calling for greater access to post-secondary education in the non-metropolitan areas of the province, the government established the Open Learning Institute (OLI), with a mandate to develop and deliver educational programs using distance education methods.

Two years later, in 1980, the Knowledge Network (KN) came into being as B.C.'s educational television network with a mandate to provide general public education programs and to work with the province's educational institutions in delivering formal instruction via television.

These two organizations were merged to form the Open Learning Agency in April, 1988, with the operating components being the Open University, the Open College, and the Knowledge Network. The Open University offers courses in the arts, sciences, and administrative studies, while the Open College is responsible for adult basic education, career, technical, and vocational courses. The Knowledge Network continues to support electronic delivery of courses from educational institutions and provides general education programs for adults and children.

Open learning in B.C. has grown significantly since the establishment of the Open Learning Institute and the Knowledge Network. In the 1979–80 academic year, the Open Learning Institute offered seven courses and enrolled 2,955 students. Today, OLA offers more than 130 courses with total annual enrolments of more than 21,000. In its first year, the Knowledge Network reached sixty percent of the province's households and averaged 100,000 viewers each week. Today, the Knowledge Network reaches ninety percent of B.C. households with a weekly home viewing audience of 650,000.

The societal imperative of lifespan access to learning for all people requires institutions characterized by openness.

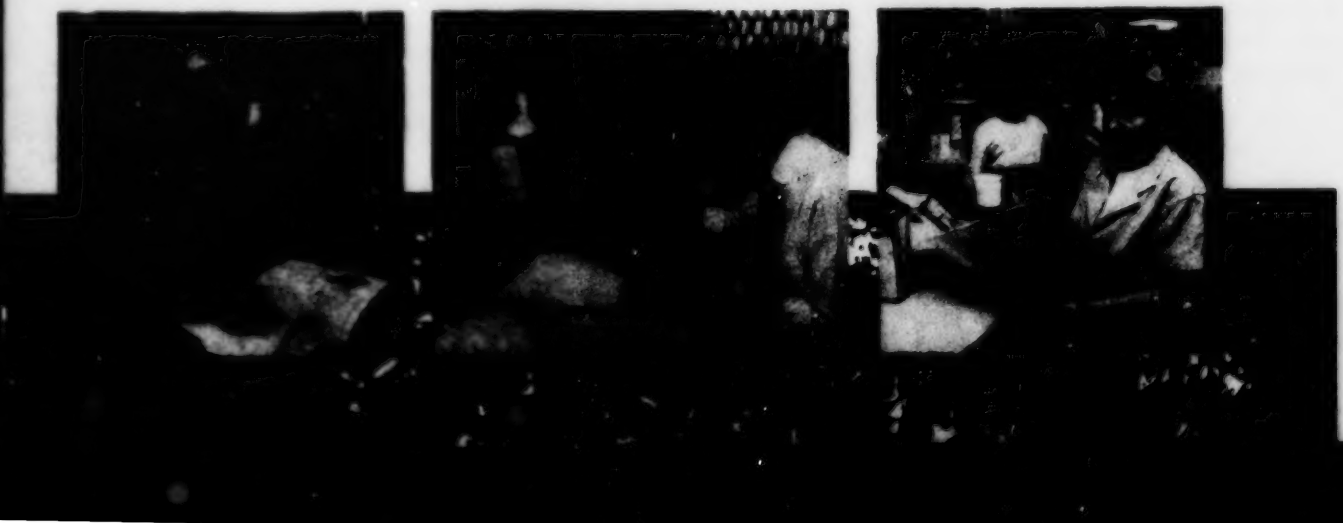
From Learning at the Back Door
by Charles C. Wedemeyer

What Is Open Learning?

Open learning has been called by some the most significant development in the field of education since World War II. The boom in population growth and the development of new and inexpensive communications technologies in the postwar years combined to create a need and provide the means to greatly expand the capacity of educational systems in both mature industrialized economies and the many new and developing nations of the world. Open learning, which often uses distance education methods as a means of delivering instruction, has roots in earlier educational developments such as correspondence study, university extension programs, and radio and television courses. It is perhaps best described in terms of its characteristic practices and principles.

Open learning:

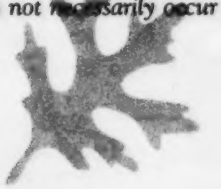
- Is organized around the proposition that learning is a lifelong process;
- Is learner-centred rather than institution-centred;
- Builds on existing skills and knowledge;
- Removes barriers to learning;
- Uses a variety of teaching and learning strategies;
- Offers a wide range of educational opportunities including general interest programs, non-credit courses, formal credit courses leading to certificates or diplomas in technical or vocational training, and undergraduate and graduate university degrees;



- Fosters collaborative, as opposed to competitive, relationships among educational institutions, including the sharing of instructional materials, collaborative program planning, transferability of skills and knowledge, and joint teaching of courses;
- Uses a variety of means to deliver self-study learning materials at a distance, supported by tutoring supplied electronically (telephone, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, live interactive television), or face-to-face, in local or regional learning centres.

Open Learning versus Distance Education

While these terms are often used to mean the same thing, they describe different concepts. Put simply, open learning refers to an educational policy while distance education describes a means by which instruction is offered. The two are linked, however, in the sense that open learning frequently makes use of distance education in delivering instruction. On the other hand, distance education does not necessarily occur in the context of open learning.



Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society.

An influential study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on global education needs and a dramatic educational initiative by the Commonwealth heads of government underscores the growing significance of open learning. In 1972 a committee of educators, chaired by the distinguished French educator, Edgar Faure, prepared a report for UNESCO which was published under the title *Towards a Learning Society*. The report, now a seminal source document in the growing library of scholarly literature on open learning and distance education, was based on a number of principles, chief among them that:

Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society.

This principle led to the recommendation that lifelong learning be "the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries." That recommendation has been acted on and today open learning institutions are part and parcel of educational systems in the mature economies of countries such as Australia, Great Britain, Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal, and in developing nations such as India, Thailand, Indonesia (whose Universitas Terbuka is pictured below), Costa Rica, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland.

The second example emerged from the 1987 meeting in Vancouver of the leaders of the Commonwealth nations at which time a new agency, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), was created. It has a mandate to promote collaboration in distance education with the long-term aim of making it possible for "any learner, anywhere in the Commonwealth, to study any distance-teaching program available from any bona fide college or university in the Commonwealth."

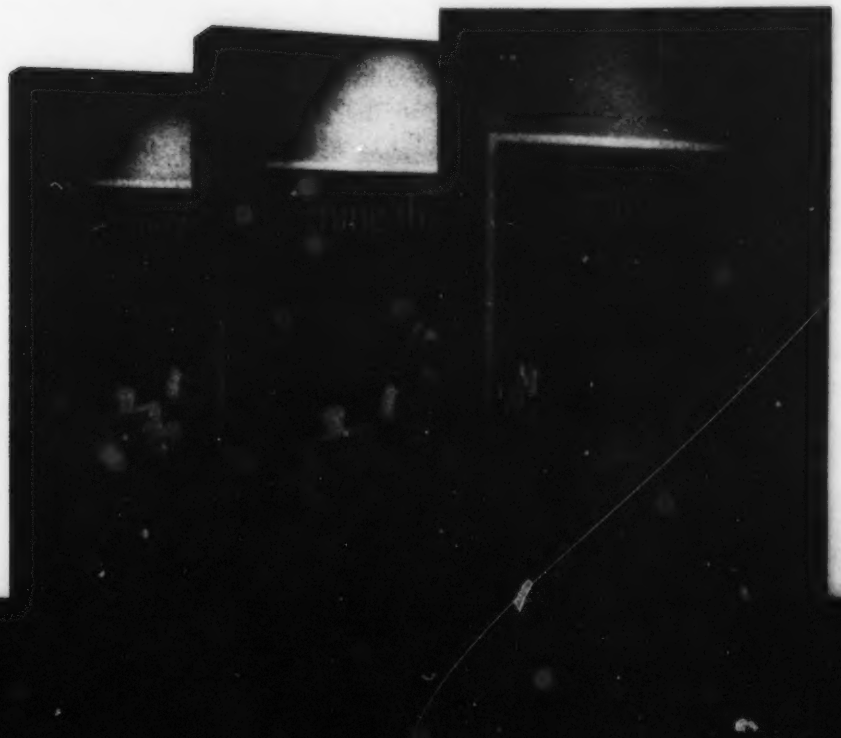
In recognition of the significant developments in open learning taking place in British Columbia, headquarters for the Commonwealth of Learning were established in Vancouver, the only Commonwealth agency ever to be located outside London.

Only the Beginning

In April, 1988, OLI and KN were merged to form the Open Learning Agency. The legislation creating the Agency also defined a fourfold mission:

- to work with the other educational organizations in the province to plan and co-ordinate the development of open learning in B.C.;
- to develop and acquire instructional materials for use by OLA and other institutions;
- to provide instruction using open learning methods;
- to develop and manage electronic networks to serve the educational needs of British Columbians.

The natural synergy effected by the merger has made possible some significant accomplishments in terms of new program and service initiatives in all of these areas, most of them collaborative in nature. They illustrate graphically how the Agency functions as a part of British Columbia's educational system.



The Planning Councils

The legislation creating OLA provided for three planning councils, one for each of the program components. The councils are key elements in fulfilling OLA's mandate to co-ordinate the development of open learning throughout the province. The councils are made up of representatives of the other post-secondary institutions, business professionals, and community leaders. For each of the components, the council's mandate is to identify program needs and foster inter-institutional collaborations, set priorities for development, and make recommendations to the board of the Open Learning Agency.

The Open University calendar is an example of the kind of inter-institutional collaboration the planning councils encourage. The OU calendar lists, in addition to OU courses, distance education courses offered by the other three provincial universities — the University of British Columbia (UBC), Simon Fraser University (SFU), and the University of Victoria (UVic). Students can register for all of these courses through the OU with the individual universities responsible for tuition of their own courses. All credits earned from courses from the other universities are applicable to an OU degree. Programs broadcast on the Knowledge Network support and enrich many of these courses.

B.C. Educational Credit Bank

An important milestone in the co-ordination of open learning in the province was the introduction, in 1989, of the B.C. Educational Credit Bank.

The Credit Bank allows B.C. residents to complete an Open College certificate or diploma or an Open University degree by consolidating transferable course credits earned from other accredited educational institutions. (The OU and OC are the first post-secondary institutions in Canada not to place any restrictions on the number of course credits one can transfer.) The Credit Bank also makes it possible for students to gain credit for "non-formal learning," that is, private study, workshops, industry-based training, or on-the-job experience. To exercise this option, students complete a specially prepared distance learning course, *Portfolio Development*. In the process of completing the course, students assemble the necessary documentation of their skills and knowledge in a manner that can be formally assessed and measured against a recognized and respected standard.

The Credit Bank also provides a unique document evaluation service for people needing to equate foreign training and work credentials to equivalent Canadian standards for employment purposes. Clients are referred to the Credit Bank from a variety of sources — colleges, federal and provincial ministries, and volunteer immigration services. OLA, which has trouble keeping up with the demand (more than 120 requests a month), is one of only two organizations providing this service in western Canada.

Fire Services Diploma and Degree Program

In a joint development with the Justice Institute of B.C. (JI), the Open College, the Open University, and JI's Fire Academy have put together an integrated program of existing courses that will enable fire service personnel to enrol in a college-level diploma program beginning in the fall of 1990. Graduates of the diploma program will then be able to take a prescribed program of OU courses that will earn them an OU degree in public sector management. JI, OU, and the University of Victoria are in the process of designing a degree program in fire service management which would be made available nationally. This is the first such joint diploma/degree program developed in B.C. It will also be available to occupational health and safety personnel, insurance industry professionals, other specialists from industry, and interested members of the public. Students enrolling in the fire services diploma program can have courses already taken evaluated for transfer credit through the B.C. Educational Credit Bank.

Bachelor of Health Sciences

Planning is presently under way among five institutions — British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Cariboo College, Vancouver Community College (VCC), Douglas College, and OU — to develop a program that will offer a variety of options to health care professionals in a broad range of specialities. Thus a graduate of Cariboo's diploma program for lab technicians, or Douglas College's psychiatric nursing program, or VCC's program in medical imaging will be able to match those credits with credits earned from a program of OU courses (these might differ from one speciality to another) for an OU bachelor's degree in health sciences. This program, providing necessary funding is secured, will meet the growing demand from health care professionals for university degree accreditation. The potential of this program, given there are 17,000 nurses in British Columbia, is considerable.

OU/UVic Degrees in Administrative Studies

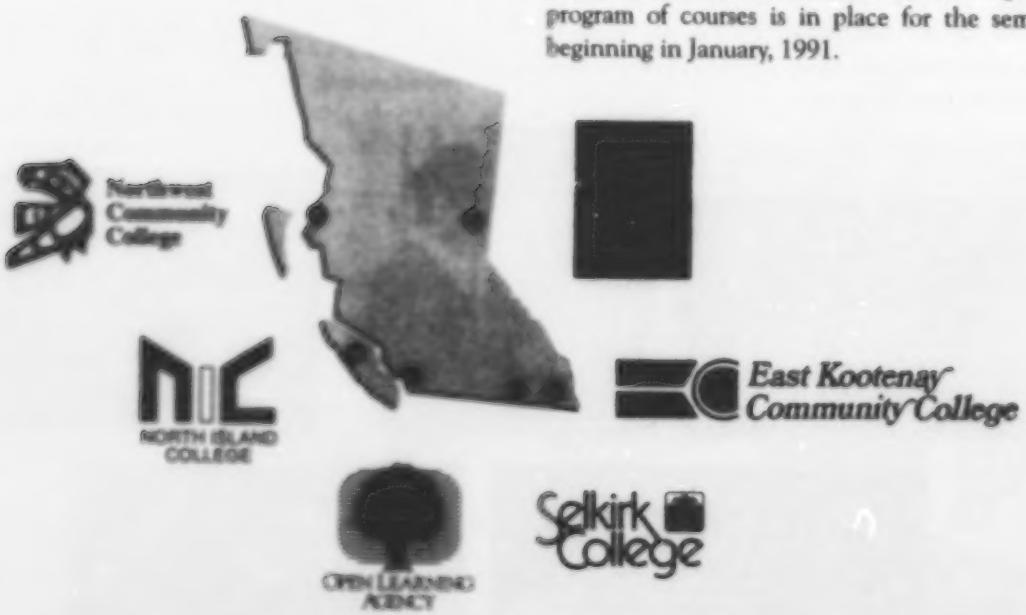
Building on UVic's existing diploma in public sector management, this collaboration allows students who have completed that program to combine those credits with credits from a program of OU courses to "ladder" their diploma into an OU bachelor's degree in administrative studies.

Program in Administration of Aboriginal Governments

Like the public sector management program, this allows students who have completed UVic's certificate in management of aboriginal governments to combine those credits with credits earned from a prescribed program of OU courses for an OU degree in administrative studies.

The Small Colleges Consortium

This program was designed to provide enhanced delivery of upper- and lower-level OU courses to students at Selkirk, Northern Lights, Northwest Community, North Island Community, and East Kootenay Community Colleges. In 1989–90 fall and spring terms, students at Northern Lights and Selkirk completed upper-level OU courses in psychology and sociology which were enhanced with a weekly two-hour teleconference linking the students and the course tutor. In the fall 1990 semester, a program of courses in English, philosophy, mathematics, history, biology, and political science was offered, and an expanded program of courses is in place for the semester beginning in January, 1991.



The Agency has a small but highly skilled staff of specialists — instructional designers, audio and video producers, graphic designers, and copy editors — who, together with subject matter experts and consultants, prepare courses and instructional programs. These are variously designed to be delivered to the home, workplace, or learning centre using a variety of media — print, audio, video, video disk. In addition to in-house produced programs, OLA also adapts courses and programs from other institutions and collaborates with other institutions in joint development projects.

Instruction is supported at a distance by telephone tutoring, audio/video teleconferencing, computer conferencing, and face-to-face instruction in learning centres. The result is flexible, cost-effective, learner-centred education and training designed to meet the needs of individual learners and targeted learner groups.

At OLA, critical elements in the design and the development of open learning programs involve providing for:

- *appropriate modes of delivery* — the way the course is tutored, i.e., by telephone, audio or video teleconferencing, computer conferencing, or face-to-face in combination with one or more of the foregoing;
- *effective evaluation* — how well the course works in terms of students' achieving the instructional objectives;
- *timely maintenance* — using the results of the evaluation process to ensure that delivery modes are appropriate, instructional design is effective, and the content remains fresh and current.

OU/KN/ ECCAD Fine Arts Telecourses

A partnership of Open University, Knowledge Network, and Emily Carr College of Art and Design (ECCAD) has produced five fine arts telecourses: "Color: An Introduction," "Mark and Image," "Art in Canada to 1871," "Contemporary Art in Canada," and "Survey of Western Art." A sixth telecourse, "Three Dimensional Form," is in development. Together they comprise the first of a series of courses that combine video programs (aired twice a year on KN and available on tape), print materials, and studio assignments that will make ECCAD's Foundation program available to students working at a distance. Course teams are comprised of ECCAD faculty, KN production personnel, and OU instructional designers. In 1989, "Color: An Introduction" received the prestigious Ohio State Award for video production.

Capilano College/OU Audio Course on B.C. Writers

Still in the planning stage, this course will team up faculty from Capilano's Media and English departments with OU course development staff to produce a print and audio survey of British Columbia's varied contemporary literary landscape. Students will read selections from such writers as Audrey Thomas, Jack Hodgins, Sharon Thesen, W. P. Kinsella, and Phyllis Webb, while audiotapes will allow students to hear the writers read and discuss their work in a workshop setting.

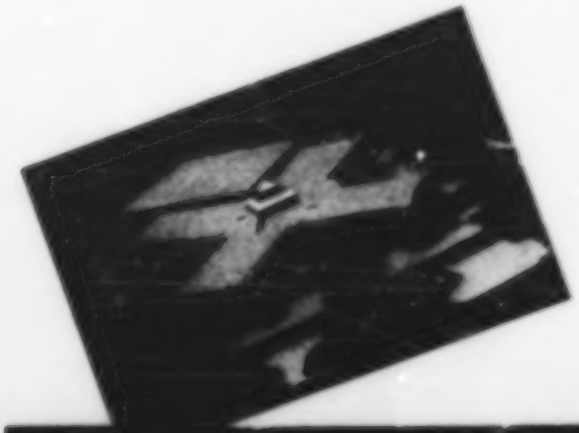
Educational Publishing at OLA

It is a little-known fact that OLA is the largest educational publisher in B.C. and among the largest in Canada, producing materials to serve OLA students and clients, as well as other institutions in Canada and abroad. OLA's print-based courses and learning materials are produced in-house using electronic publishing technologies. The OLA print shop is specifically designed to handle both medium and short runs on a cost-effective basis. In fiscal 1989–1990 the OLA print shop produced more than 21 million pages.

Facilities

OLA operations are currently housed in three locations. The print shop, warehouse, audio studio, OC and OU staff, library, student registry, advising, finance, payroll, human resources, and information services all are in a three-story building in Richmond. The Knowledge Network's broadcast facility, including a small production studio and editing suite, is in the Instructional Resource Centre at UBC. Additional administrative offices are located on two floors of an office building at 475 West Georgia Street in downtown Vancouver.

In September, 1990, construction began on a new facility to bring all of OLA's staff and operations under one roof. The new building is on ten acres in Discovery Park in Burnaby and is scheduled to be completed by early 1992.



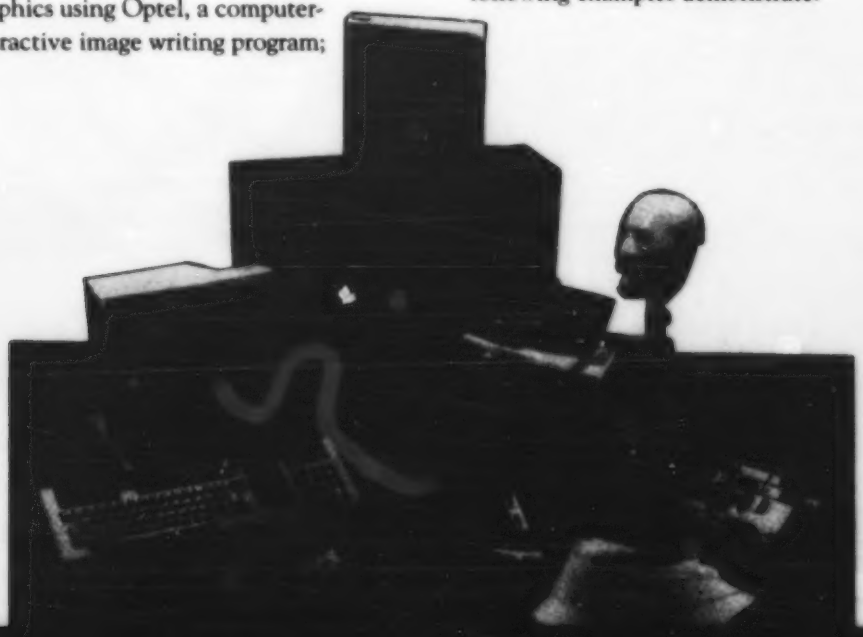
How Students Learn in Open Learning

Open learning, as we have seen, implies a variety of ways and means of making learning materials and instruction available to students. These different delivery formats are brought into play to meet particular learning situations and requirements. They include:

- A province-wide network of telephone tutoring;
- Live lectures with phone-ins on the Knowledge Network;
- Face-to-face group tutoring in seminars, workshops, lab sessions, or clinical practice;
- Computer-assisted learning;
- Audio teleconferencing and computer conferencing;
- Audio graphics using Optel, a computer-based interactive image writing program;
- Self-study course materials which include texts, specially prepared course notes and workbooks, and for some courses, audio- and/or videotapes, computer software, and lab kits.

Within these various formats, students are able to choose the time, place, and pace to complete their learning programs. Exams are given at one of more than sixty examination centres throughout the province. There is continuous registration and students have the option of completing their courses in less or more than the usual completion time.

Clearly the diversity of student needs and requirements makes it essential to provide a broad range of options in the delivery of courses and programs. In every instance this increased range of options for students is the result of collaboration with other institutions and organizations, as the following examples demonstrate.



General Programming on the Knowledge Network

The Knowledge Network's broad range of programming reflects its commitment to realizing television's capacity to instruct, entertain, and inform. In pursuit of this goal, the Knowledge Network broadcasts almost six thousand hours of programming annually. Approximately half of this time is used by colleges, universities, and other institutions on whose behalf complete telecourses and individual courses in support of credit and non-credit courses are broadcast throughout the year. Time is also made available to the province's elementary and secondary schools for curriculum-based broadcasts to the K–12 sector as part of the Knowledge Network's Schools TV program.

The remainder of the Knowledge Network's broadcast schedule is devoted to general education programming designed to build awareness, explore issues, and acquire various programs and skills. The program mix includes a cross-section of theme areas:

- arts and humanities
- B.C. lifestyles
- career development
- economic development
- health
- human and social issues
- leisure
- personal development
- science and technology
- social sciences

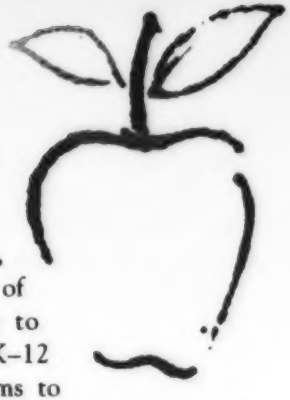
In many cases series of programs are supplemented with a host and a viewer's guide to place the programs in perspective for B.C. audiences. Recent examples of such series include: *Classic Theatre* with host Peter McCoppin, featuring productions of Shakespeare and other major works from the stage and dramatizations of great works of literature; *Native Indians: Images of Reality*, with hosts Roy Bonisteel and Tracey Olson, documenting the Native Indian experience in Canada; *Cross Currents*, with host Jim Carney, introducing documentary films on current international issues and events; and *Workfile*, with host Barbara Constantine, covering issues related to career planning and options. Other supplementary materials for these series are available to learners through the Knowledge Bookstore.

The Knowledge Network's original productions include the popular *B.C. Moments* as well as more ambitious endeavors such as *Inside Stories: Journey Into Self-Esteem*. This is part of a project developed by the Knowledge Network with major financial assistance from federal and provincial government departments and private foundations. This project includes community forums, workshops, group teleconferences, and a video/print resource package promoting the development of healthy self-esteem in individuals and communities. The project as a whole, with its emphasis on community process, is designed to help community groups initiate their own programs to increase self-esteem and address social problems such as substance abuse, crime, family violence, teenage pregnancies, and children with learning disabilities.

KidZone

KN's popular children's series first aired in the 1989–90 broadcast season. It was designed to meet the guidelines presented in a 1988 research report which sought to determine parents' criteria for high quality television programming for children. *KidZone* incorporated all the report's major recommendations — children in real situations, a mixture of realism and fantasy, and opportunities to interact with on-screen activities.

The half-hour magazine-style programs for children aged seven to twelve years feature six young hosts, and use drama, documentary, and rock video to explore a variety of topics. In the first season these included the environment, literacy, multiculturalism, drug and alcohol awareness, and sports. *KidZone* is aired twice weekly during prime time hours and weekdays during Schools TV. It is supported by a magazine which appears monthly during the series run. The series' second season is now in production with the first program scheduled to air in early January, 1991. *KidZone* is also notable for the fact that the major portion of its annual budget is supported by contributions from the private sector.



Schools TV

Through this program, funded by the Ministry of Education, KN is able to telecast 650 hours of K–12 curriculum-based programs to schools throughout the province. This service is designed to enhance classroom studies and provides teachers with key instructional resources. It is especially useful to geographically remote schools where access to specialized teaching staff and resources is limited. Subject areas include math, science, language arts, social studies, business education, and languages. In many cases, off-air taping rights have been secured, which allows teachers to tape the programs and use them at the appropriate time. In addition to the broadcasts, KN provides a semi-annual program guide and guides to assist teachers in the effective classroom use of Schools TV programs.

Native Learning Centres

An agreement worked out by the Open College, in concert with six native learning centres in Ladysmith, Bella Coola, Kitwancool, Cranbrook, Prince George, and Canim Lake, makes it possible for students in these centres to take OC adult basic education courses. These courses are offered in a classroom setting and are supported by OC tutors. This has raised completion rates from around thirty percent to over eighty percent.

A proposal for a pilot project in which the Agency would work in co-operation with Northern Lights College, the Fort St. John Regional Correspondence School, the Education Technology Centre, and northern school districts would establish three to five electronic learning centres in northern B.C. to test the effectiveness of using such centres for course delivery primarily to native people. The proposal is presently under consideration by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT).

Workplace Training Systems

This Open College program (WTS), received initial project funding from MAETT and Employment and Immigration Canada. It was undertaken in response to the growing demand in business and industry for flexible, workplace-centred training. OC staff work with employers to develop programs designed to solve a particular training or retraining problem. OC consultants have the full array of Open College courses to draw on, but also link up with other colleges and service providers to add breadth and depth to the resource pool of training materials. WTS clients range from small businesses like Teleflex (Canada) Inc., a marine engineering firm requiring specialized English language training for many of its staff, to large corporations like B.C. Tel and Mobile Data International. Discussions are presently under way with the Ministry with a view to expanding the services of WTS on a provincial basis.

OU Convocation, March 1990

On March 16, 1990, the first Open University convocation was held in the Robson Square Media Centre. Forty-two students received their baccalaureate degrees, while honorary degrees were awarded to Patrick McGeer and Walter Hardwick (open learning's political godfathers in B.C.), John Ellis, first principal of the Open Learning Institute, and Peter Gzowski, who delivered the convocation address. Appropriately, for a distance education university, Mr. — or rather Dr. — Gzowski, because of previous commitments, delivered his address to the convocation via videotape.

Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Design Degree Programs

The first of several so-called capstone programs was arranged with Emily Carr College of Art and Design. It allows graduates of ECCAD's four-year diploma programs to cap their fine arts training with an additional sixty credit hours of courses through the Open University to obtain a Bachelor of Fine Arts or Bachelor of Design degree. The 1990 OU convocation included ten B.F.A. recipients from ECCAD.

Bachelor of Music Therapy

Capilano College and the OU jointly offer the first Bachelor of Music Therapy degree in western Canada. The new four-year program will enable students and practising music therapists to meet new accreditation standards set by the Canadian Association of Music Therapy. Under the terms of the bilateral agreement, students may take the entire program at Capilano College but receive their degree from the Open University. Still in the planning stage is a Bachelor of Music in Jazz degree program with the OU and the College jointly providing the curriculum.

Access Ability

The Open College has recently taken over from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) responsibility for the Access Ability program which provides physically disabled adults with computer programming skills for the mainframe business environment. A sixty-five-member Business Advisory Committee is involved in planning, curriculum, recruitment, and selection of students, as well as evaluation and placement of graduates. Since its inception by the WCB in 1987, Access Ability has successfully trained — and placed in permanent employment — thirty graduates. The new Access Ability Centre in Burnaby opened its doors in September, 1990.

OU/BCIT Joint Degree Programs

Until now, business students from the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) have had to travel out of province to receive credit toward an advanced program of study. An agreement between BCIT and OU allows graduates of the Institute's business diploma programs to combine their BCIT diploma with credits earned from courses in OU's administrative studies program for an Open University bachelor's degree in administrative studies.

Lieutenant Governor's Silver Medal

This medal is given to an Open College student graduating from a one-year certificate program and is awarded on the basis of academic excellence and significant contributions to the community. This year the award went to Bill Kuhlein of Vernon, a graduate of the construction supervision program. A native of Germany, Mr. Kuhlein came to Canada in 1956 and has worked as a carpenter for the Vernon school district for more than fifteen years. He is a Big Brother to a twelve-year-old Vernon boy, a member of the Vernon Search and Rescue team, and is active in the Lutheran Church. For the past eleven years Mr. Kuhlein and his wife have sponsored two children from a Third World country.

Discovery Training Network

OLA's Discovery Training Network (DTN), began operation in October 1988. Today it is British Columbia's largest on-line educational database and serves as a powerful electronic supplement to the OU and OC calendars. It carries information on over 200,000 educational and training courses from both public and private organizations, including listings of:

- B.C. college and university programs and courses
- B.C. technical and vocational training programs
- B.C., Canada-wide, and U.S. distance education courses and programs
- Canadian and U.S. seminars and workshops
- B.C. Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses and programs
- Adult Special Education (ASE) courses and programs

This information can be accessed with a computer and modem. Those currently availing themselves of DTN services in B.C. include home users, businesses, service organizations, high schools, colleges, universities, public libraries, private trade schools, and government offices. The database is constantly revised and updated and indexing procedures are based on current classification systems in consultation with indexing experts in each field.

Community Campus Network

This initiative will create a network of electronic learning centres throughout the province which will provide students with access to program information, equipment (faxes, computers, VCRs), and learning activities. Each Community Campus Network (CCN) centre will have access to the Discovery Training Network database, will offer advising services, and will allow users to participate in audio teleconferences, audiographics sessions, video conferences, or face-to-face tutorial sessions. Centres will also be able to adapt or develop a range of courses or programs on their own for local or regional use. In addition to individual students, the facilities and resources of CCN centres will be available to educational institutions, government agencies, business, and industry. A request for three-year operational funding of four model centres is now under consideration by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

Audio Teleconferencing Network

The Knowledge Network has been offering its Teleconferencing Service to the province's secondary and post-secondary institutions, government and health organizations, and private industry since 1984. Conference bookings have increased an average of thirty-five percent every year. Advance bookings for the coming year show a forty percent increase over last year. To accommodate this increased demand KN has installed a new, forty-line, digital audio-teleconferencing bridge.

Two-thirds of the audio teleconferences are in support of distance learning credit courses. In this context, audio conferencing offers an inexpensive means of providing a live, interactive component to the learning process. Subject areas covered in course-related conferences include nursing, psychology, education, sociology, childcare, philosophy, criminology, social work, and English. To support these programs, the Knowledge Network has prepared a special training course in the use of audio teleconferencing as an instructional medium. Other groups served by the audio teleconferencing network include businesses and professional organizations.

Research and International Development

The newly established office of Research and International Development (RID) is responsible for co-ordinating the Agency's research and international activities.

Research and Evaluation

There are three main levels in the OLA research program:

- System-wide research, information collection, and analysis on open learning activities on a province-wide basis;
- Research, information collection, and analysis on an agency-wide basis;
- Research and evaluation of agency courses and programs.

The Agency works closely with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, co-ordinating and assisting with research on a province-wide basis. The Agency is presently helping MAETT develop a process for collecting province-wide statistics on the provision of open and distance learning, and is producing an inventory of courses and a set of case-studies of different kinds of open and distance learning within the province.

Each year, as part of the Agency's strategic planning process, the research office produces an environmental scan designed to isolate key trends in the B.C. economy, and political, technological, and social developments that have direct relevance to the work of the Agency. From the scan, OLA identifies priority areas for course and program development.

The research office also encourages and assists external students to conduct research studies of direct relevance to OLA. Currently, six external students are using OLA as a source of data for their studies. OLA produces an annual digest of statistics on the Agency's activities, including course enrolments and completion rates.

Responsibility for program research and evaluation lies with individual program areas, in liaison with the research office. OLA has acquired a computer-based management information system which allows directors, managers, and project co-ordinators to conduct their own research enquiries by drawing aggregate data from the Agency's main-frame database. The research office provides advice to the components in research and evaluation design, but evaluation of the academic component of OLA courses is built into the course development process by means of peer review of learning materials produced by academic specialists.

Recently completed studies include the following:

- Case study on cost-effectiveness of work-based training versus conventional apprenticeships;
- An analysis of career, technical, vocational and basic training needs in British Columbia;
- Open College evaluation of student support services;
- Evaluation of Open University courses and administrative services;
- Survey of non-completing Open University students.

International Development

Internationally, the Open Learning Agency's involvement extends around the Pacific Rim, Australia, Asia, and the Middle East, delivering materials and services ranging from marketing individual courseware packages to providing complete educational systems.

OLA currently has a C$ 4.7 million contract from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to assist with the development of Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia. OLA works closely with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and has provided consultants for the COL in Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia. OLA also provides services and materials to the Hong Kong Open Learning Institute. Through partner organizations such as Caritas in Hong Kong, OLA offers Canadian credits and qualifications to overseas students studying at home, using distance learning methods.

The Agency has recently completed a project for the Toronto-based Foundation for International Training that resulted in the production of a video with print support on key environmental concepts, aimed at decision-makers in government ministries in developing countries. The package, produced by Open University and Knowledge Network staff, will be the first of similar training programs, with the next one concerned with watershed management.

The Agency is negotiating a similar contract with the Commonwealth of Learning for a video and print package on the use of technology in distance education, again aimed at key decision-makers in developing countries.

Marketing

OLA-produced courses and learning materials have been acquired by institutions in Canada and throughout the world. In the last fiscal year alone, educational institutions in Hong Kong acquired nearly $10,000 worth of OLA course materials. The marketing department also manages the Knowledge Bookstore, which allows viewers to purchase books, pamphlets, and videos relating to KN programs. Total sales revenues for the marketing department in 1989–90 were up fifty-eight percent over the previous year.

In 1989 the Board of the Open Learning Agency authorized the creation of the Open Learning Foundation as a charitable and philanthropic organization, to provide more diversified sources of revenue for the Agency's long-term development. The Foundation will establish major endowment funds to support the development and maintenance of educational materials for the Open College, the Knowledge Network, and the Open University. Additional endowments will support scholarships and bursaries in open learning, improvements in facilities and equipment in the regional centres as well as in OLA's central office and production centre.

Partners in Knowledge

This successful program represents the first major effort to expand OLA's revenue base. Partners in Knowledge, the Knowledge Network's viewer donor program, was launched early in 1988. Its aim is to broaden KN's base of support within the community and to provide additional funds for program acquisition. As of April, 1990, there were 12,660 new and renewing Partners in Knowledge who contributed to the Network's program acquisition fund.

Management staff of the Open Learning Agency began the process of formulating a strategic plan in early 1988. This involved consulting with other educational institutions and with the Ministry, and analysing the implications for education of current provincial economic and demographic data. This process made it clear that in order to meet the extraordinary training and educational needs of the province, greater emphasis must be given to providing greater access to comprehensive professional upgrading and skills retraining programs. These programs will help keep those presently employed abreast of technological and market changes, as well as retrain those outside the workforce, whether unemployed or retired, whose numbers will help meet the skilled workforce requirements of the nineties.

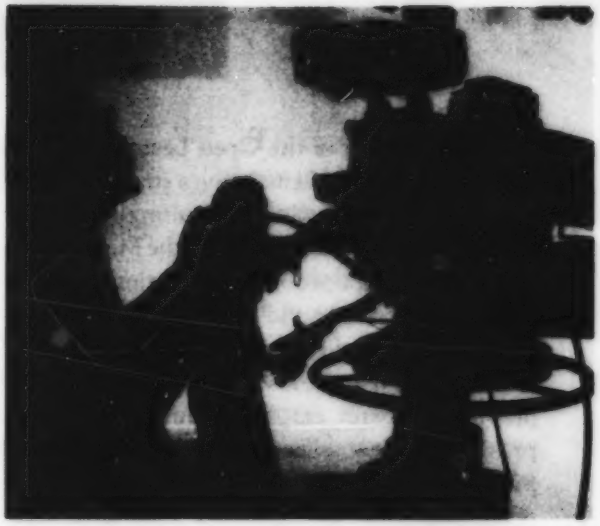
The results of the planning process have sharply defined the Agency's strategic choices. In the context of the principal elements of our legislative mandate, the OLA has determined that, in the course of the next three years, it will:

- Focus on developing collaborative ventures with other educational institutions as well as organizations in the private sector to provide greater access to degree programs, and professional and skills training for adults within and outside the workforce.
- Develop instructional materials collaboratively using a wide range of design and delivery models to ensure that programs required for credentials are available to students.
- Take the lead in developing a province-wide network of community-based learning centres linked electronically for use by other educational institutions as well as local private sector organizations.

The Challenge in Training and Education

OLA's planning process underscored what by now is common knowledge, namely that major and irreversible changes are taking place in the B.C. economy. Traditional sources of jobs, particularly in the resource sector, are declining because of mechanization. At the same time, existing jobs are changing from full-time to part-time, from one vocation to another, and (because of technological change) within the same job.

We must also train and retrain significant numbers of those both in and outside the workforce — a conservative estimate is 150,000 a year. The education and training required covers the gamut: language and communication skills, technical training, and training in the sciences and professions. This demand is not one that our campus-based institutions alone, even with greatly increased funding, will be able to meet.



Meeting the Challenge

British Columbia is not unique in this respect. The critical mismatch between supply and demand of a trained and skilled workforce is common to countries and jurisdictions throughout the world. However, we are more fortunate than most. With the Open Learning Agency, we have the mechanism in place that enables us to meet this challenge.

The Open Learning Agency, with its experience in designing and implementing programs for and with other educational institutions, business organizations, and government agencies, is uniquely positioned to take the lead in helping close this critical gap between supply and demand. The Agency's expertise together with its extensive inventory of courses and programs can help ensure a trained and educated workforce that will keep B.C. competitive in the increasingly complex national and international economic environment.

If you would like more information about the Open Learning Agency or its operating components, the following publications are available free of charge:

Open College Calendar 1990–1991
Open University Calendar 1990–1991
Knowledge Network Guide (published bimonthly)
Knowledge Network Telecourse Guide
Schools TV Guide
Quick Facts Annual Report 1989–1990
OLA Strategic Plan 1991–1994

For any or all of these, write to:
Open Learning Agency
P.O. Box 94000
Richmond, B.C.
V6Y 2A2

Or you may make your request by telephoning, toll-free in British Columbia, 1-800-663-9711. In the Lower Mainland phone 660-2221. A telephone device for the hearing impaired is in place at 660-2258.

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